

SIERRA CLUB



NORTHWEST REGIONAL CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

June 5, 1999

Hanford Remedial Action EIS
U. S. Dept. of Energy
Richland Operations Office
P.O. Box 550
MSIN HO-12
Richland, WA 99352

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DOE-RL / DIS

Dear Sirs and Mesdames:

On behalf of the 550,000 members of the Sierra Club nationally and our 30,000 members in the Pacific Northwest, this letter comments on the revised draft Hanford Remedial Action Environmental Impact Statement and Comprehensive Land Use Plan released in May by the U.S. Department of Energy (DoE). For more than a century, the Sierra Club has worked to protect natural lands and productive wildlife habitats such as those found on the Hanford Nuclear Reservation. Our organization has been a leading advocate of salmon recovery in the Columbia Basin, so we congratulate the DoE for its proposal to protect the Hanford Reach -- the last, best spawning ground for wild fall chinook salmon in the Basin.

The Sierra Club enthusiastically supports the preferred alternative in the EIS, but we would respectfully urge the DoE to make several improvements which would provide better protection to the natural values at the Hanford Nuclear Reservation.

The proposed national wildlife refuge should include all of the public lands on the Wahluke Slope, the Hanford Reach especially its islands, the McGee Ranch, and the Arid Lands Ecology Reserve.

While waiting to decide land-use classifications for the contaminated core lands of the Hanford Nuclear Reservation, DoE should proceed immediately to protect these sensitive special places and fragile natural values. If necessary to do so, DoE should prepare and sign a separate Record of Decision establishing the national wildlife refuge.

- In the later Record of Decision, DOE should permanently protect the ecologically significant lands in the central core of the Hanford Nuclear Reservation, such as Gable Mountain, Gable Butte, Hanford Sand Dunes, Vernal Pools, and other important wildlife habitats.

The DoE should never allow agriculture or livestock grazing within the Hanford Nuclear Reservation. Irrigated agriculture would destroy the salmon spawning grounds of the Hanford Reach with sediment and polluted runoff. Particularly threatening in this regard is any agricultural development on the White Bluffs which would erode badly into the Columbia River. One of the chief reasons that the Hanford Nuclear Reservation has preserved such outstanding examples of high steppe sagebrush lands is the prohibition on livestock grazing since 1942. Cattle and sheep should remain outside the reservation in the future.

To protect fragile natural values, the DoE should restrict mining on the reservation to only what is required to carry out the clean up of nuclear contamination. Similarly industrial use should take place only on those lands already developed at the southeastern end of Hanford. The only acreage developed for high-intensity recreation should be the museum at the B-Reactor. DoE should flatly reject any and all proposals for resorts, golf courses, and similar large-scale recreational facilities.

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Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the revised draft EIS. Again we are grateful to the DoE for taking the initiative in the preferred alternative toward protection of special natural values at the Hanford Nuclear Reservation.

Sincerely,

Margie Van Cleve

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